

# A Knot of White Ribbon more

By Mindah E. Merrifield.

(An incident in the life of Mrs. J. K. Barney, Superintendent of Prison, Gaol Police, and Almshouses work for the National W. C. T. U., U. S. A.)

THE rain fell in a heavy mist, and the wind soughed mournfully through the trees, sweeping the dead leaves in showers over the fast fading grass and wet pavement. The street lamps gave out a faint flickering light, and the pedestrians drew their wraps closer and shivered as they hurried along. For an hour or more the figure of a woman might have been seen wandering up and down the streets, and the face upon which the light shone was that of a young girl scarce twenty. The brown hair was pushed back from the white face, and a pair of dark hazel eyes looked with a frightened expression upon the passers-by, who did not seem to heed her presence in the least.

The girl leaned for a moment against a fence, and a great tearless sob broke from her lips; and at that moment a lady who had just passed with several others stepped back, and laid a gentle hand on the girl's arm. A voice sweeter than the sweetest music to a troubled heart, spoke, and a face made beautiful by its love of God and humanity, with the same love shining in the kindly blue eyes, bent over her, and asked:

"Let me help you; you are in trouble."

The girl looked up with a bewildered air; such words she was not used to, but in a moment she found voice to answer:

"No, you can't, unless you give me work; and my reference is, I have been one week out of gaol."

The lady gave a start, and the girl continued with a laugh:

"I knew you would turn away; no less than a hundred have done the same thing the past week."

"Surely," the sweet voice whispered, "you were not guilty?"

"Yes," she answered, "I will not lie to you, I was guilty."

The noble, loving heart gave a great throb of pity; this was her work; here was one of her chosen ones to whom she was devoting her life-work. A clear, cold voice, with a sound like a bell on an icy morning broke the momentary silence—

"My dear Mrs. Barney, don't you think you are wasting time? We will be late, and Dr. Ellis is so particular."

For a moment she hesitated; there was an audience waiting for her, who, with God's help, she must interest; and yet

She must not be left without a word of comfort. She thrust a card into the girl's hand, together with a shining silver piece, and whispered hurriedly, "Come to me in the morning at this address," and she was gone.

Something fluttered noiselessly to the walk, and the girl ran and picked it up. It was a knot of white ribbon. "I wonder if she wants it?" she soliloquized. "I guess not; I'll keep it because she dropped it." She opened her hand and looked at the silver dollar lying within. "Now I can have some supper," she thought, and she hurried away in the direction the party had taken, but they were well in advance of her. After turning several corners she found herself in front of a brilliantly lighted church; an illuminated card announced that Mrs. J. K. Barney would give an address. She stopped short; that was the name the lady had called her benefactor. She looked at her card; there it was—Mrs. J. K. Barney. Supper was forgotten, and she went into the church and slipped into the back seats. The Centre Church was crowded, the organ played and the choir sang, the pastor gave thanks for blessings past and to come, and at last gave way to the speaker of the evening, and a slender little black-robed lady, with blue eyes shining like stars, with their hope and earnestness, arose before a church filled with a fashionable and critical audience, to tell them what the mission of the white ribbon was, and how it led her out into the by-ways to search out the despised and forsaken and tell them of Christ's love, for He came to save the fallen, and as she went on, the girl in the back seat clasped the ribbon closer and her eyes lost their wildness, and a look of content came into her face.

The voice of the speaker rang out clear and sweet to the listeners as she spoke of the enemy who stole away home and happiness; and, if he did not darken their home, someone's household idol was sacrificed on the altar of mammon which they would in a measure be called to answer for, as the professing Christian people would pray, "Lead us not into temptation," and then give their influence for that which destroyed both body and soul. "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The voice was wonderfully pathetic as it repeated the precious words.

"How can His kingdom come amid such blighting sin? And His will is not done on earth because it is not in accordance with God's will to ruin." And then the speaker's voice grew soft and pleading as she begged more to vote right, to uplift the standard of right for the boys to follow, and she showed the truth for women's feet to tread, to win many to the narrow way for Christ's sake.

When at last the clear voice ceased and the speaker took her seat, the Rev. Dr. Ellis arose, and after a few compli-

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mentary remarks in regard to Mrs. Barney and a few more invoking God's blessing, the meeting was over and the people were free to express their sentiments, which they were not slow to do. Some had gone out of curiosity, some to please the noble, earnest women who had instigated the meeting, and more because at the present time Dr. Ellis' church was very popular; and as they looked at the address from different standpoints, the comments were of course somewhat varied. There were many who simply admired the gifted speaker, but there were a few who felt the responsibility of God's work, but among the number who felt the need of a Father's strength and love was a girl in the back seat, who still clasped in her hands a bit of white ribbon. One by one the people had left the church or stood in groups and talked over the meeting, till at last the girl seemed to realize it was over, and starting to her feet she glided away. She walked swiftly along till she reached rather a neat-looking lodging-house and entered for the night.

She lay awake counting the hours, as the bell in an adjoining steeple tolled them out, till at last she fell asleep to dream of fair faces.

The morning sunlight shone in at the window when at last she opened her eyes, and springing up, she made as neat a toilet as possible, and descended the stairs to the plain though comfortable dining-room, and after a hurried breakfast made her way out upon the street, in the direction given on her card. The number brought her to a large brown-stone residence, and her courage seemed to leave her as she ascended the white marble steps and gave a timid pull at the polished silver bell. The smart maid in white cap and apron, with flowing ribbons, elevated her nose as she reluctantly permitted her to enter the hall, while she went to inform Mrs. Barney of her arrival; she soon returned and directed her to follow. As the library door swung back, and the slender, graceful figure and sweet face of her new-found friend appeared, her hesitancy vanished, but her eyes filled with tears as she felt the warm hand clasp and the thrilling gaze of her blue eyes.

"Now, my child," said the lady, "tell me all about it; how is it you are left to wander through the world, and thus early tread the path of wrong?" There was no withstanding the kindly sympathetic voice, and so seated close to the lady, the girl told again the old, old story of love and sin, old since the world began, yet new to many a trusting girl's heart that has no loving hand to guide; the story of a woman's love and man's perfidy, and when at last she found herself friendless and alone, the wine cup's ruddy light bade her find comfort there, and so she had only to find the result which is always sure to follow. "So you see, m'am, nobody will take a gaoil bird, so there is no good way left for me," she concluded.

While the story had been told, the listener's heart had been

lifted to God in prayer, but she had not looked for an answer quite so soon as it was received; for as the girl's words died away the curtains parted and the hostess stood before them; her eyes filled with tears as she exclaimed:

"Oh, Mrs. Barney, I could not help but hear; forgive me. I will take her and help her; no one knows how much we have to answer for, by turning a deaf ear to the cries for help which come before our Christian people. I will not stand back in the work any longer." And it was decided that Mrs. Judge B. was to take Nellie Harris into her employ and help her to do right.

Five times has summer's sunlight shone over the stately city of Elms, and five times have the streets been wrapped in their snowy mantle, and again the Centre Church is crowded to listen to Mrs. J. K. Barney's words, which cannot fail to enthuse the hearts of her listeners, but this time she has a warm place in the hearts of the people, seventy-five earnest, loyal women, with Mrs. Judge B. at their head, are wearing the white ribbon for "God and Home and Native Land," and this time she spoke for them. Nellie Harris is still with Mrs. Judge B., and has proved faithful and true, and her name is known to every poor unfortunate one, and many bless her; but there are few who know of a little ebony box in her room which contains a card and a little knot of white ribbon over which she shed many bitter tears in her struggle for right at first.

To-night she too wears a white ribbon, for the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin, and no one would recognize in the quiet, lady-like looking girl the wreck of five years ago. But Mrs. Barney remembers, and her greeting is cordial, as to a friend.

Mrs. Judge B. has found by blessed experience that a few words, even on the busy streets, will bring forth abundant fruit. Dr. Ellis' prayer comes from the depths of his heart this night, and his words are wonderfully tender, for he knows the little story connected with the speaker's last visit, and when he ends with a blessing on the white ribbon, which is fast encircling the world, and all the members of the W. C. T. U., there is a heartfelt and earnest "Amen."

Reader, there is many a Nellie Harris in our crowded streets, but there are few Mrs. Barneys; let us all endeavor to live closer to the beautiful life from which she takes her example, and in a consecrated work for God and humanity find the rest and blessing of the promise—

"Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me."

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